

## Executive Summary – Learning Communities and Student Experience Task Force

For far too long Brandeis has been described as a “hidden gem.” There is a perceived reluctance to embrace what is unique and most special about the institution, and we lack language to consistently communicate our heritage and values. Our great strength in faculty/student interactions that offer life-changing learning experiences must be embraced and expanded, facilitating not only increased faculty student interactions, but also greater connections and experiences between and among graduate and undergraduate students, alumni, and staff members. At the same time, there are real and pervasive challenges to the health and satisfaction of our community, including the quality and quantity of our residence halls, campus dining experiences, recreational facilities, and common spaces to facilitate a sense of community and connection.

As a result, the recommendations of the LC&SE Task Force are not prioritized, as they are all intertwined. Specific initiatives can be undertaken to varying degrees and in different sequence, offering ways to balance funding needs with these ambitious goals. Yet in seeking to realize the amazing potential of Brandeis we suggest that campus spirit, interactive engagement, community health, optimized capacity, and our commitment to social justice are not independent, and in many ways not even distinct from one another. The success of our institution depends on each and every one of those areas succeeding.

Towards this end, we propose that a central vision for strategic planning should be that Brandeis students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends will be connected to and infused with pride for the institution. Brandeis spirit will become an assumption/expectation, aligned closely with a well-known reputation across the country and around the world, and with students and faculty viewing Brandeis one of the most desirable higher education destinations. Both internally and externally, Brandeis will be recognized as the premiere research institution with a commitment to social justice, offering transformative faculty/student experiences, and celebrating our unique Jewish heritage through our diverse, multicultural, and multi-faith community.

The following recommendations were organized around related action steps for planning purposes: Social Justice; Campus Spirit; Recruitment, Enrollment, and Capacity; Community Health; and Campus Engagement. Common themes among and throughout those recommendations include:

Brandeis will launch a comprehensive communications campaign, internally and externally. This will be centrally led and coordinated but will engage all members of the community to develop language and themes resonating with our values and strengths.

Brandeis will focus campus spirit around our values, leveraging our commitment to social justice, expanding our transformative faculty/student/alumni/faculty interactions, and embracing our strengths in the arts and cultural diversity along with new community interactions around athletics and competition.

Brandeis will remove barriers to student satisfaction by matching campus capacity to enrollment, raising the quality of our facilities, and making purposeful efforts to raise the physical and emotional health of our community.

## **Vision - Brandeis as the Center for Social Justice**

Brandeis will be known throughout the world as THE top tier liberal arts research university with a mission of social justice. The entire Brandeis community will embrace and actively engage in social justice action and research, setting an expectation that all members of the Brandeis community participate in social justice activities and finding ways to recognize and reward those who play leadership roles in these endeavors.

## **Recommendation**

Brandeis will establish the *Social Justice Connection*, a highly visible, central hub for existing and future social justice activities across the institution and for the entire Brandeis community. In its efforts to shine a spotlight on existing social justice activities and to promote more of them, the *Connection* will be a catalyst for nurturing campus spirit, engagement, and a greater sense of community while fostering collaborative and collective activity. The *Connection* will offer networks for practitioners and researchers among faculty, students, alumni, staff members, and friends of Brandeis, and promote Brandeis social justice pursuits to the world.

## **Rationale**

Our commitment to social justice is one of the factors that makes Brandeis distinctive in the higher education marketplace, but we have yet to achieve our full potential in this area. Some students feel that this commitment is more words than action, while others feel that our disparate efforts would benefit from promotion and collaborative coordination.

The *Social Justice Connection* will raise the visibility of ongoing efforts, bringing many different Brandeis constituencies closer, including faculty, staff, researchers, and students, both graduate and undergraduate, with a common interest in becoming change agents for Waltham and the world.

The *Social Justice Connection* will not compete with or manage campus efforts, but rather will serve as a resource that could strengthen and increase the visibility and viability of these current efforts and potentially act as a convener of disparate groups with overlapping interests in areas of social justice throughout the Brandeis community.

Perhaps most importantly, it will take a leading, yet collaborative role in shaping discussions of what social justice means at Brandeis in the future, as well as an incubator for social justice activities and programming.

## **Action Items**

- Create the *Social Justice Connection*:
  - Space – visible campus location in high traffic area
  - Personnel – explore appropriate dedicated position(s)
- Convene existing groups with overlapping missions and activities to facilitate collaboration
- Establish, within the Connection, a Social Justice Network to provide links between Brandeis alumni and friends, as well as with those on campus.
- Expand/promote 'Deis Impact, our week-long inter-campus conference on social justice.
- Incorporate social justice into existing and future Brandeis activities, recruitment efforts and events: publications, websites, athletics, arts and cultural events.
- Recognize student participation in social justice with awards and graduation recognition (cords?).
- Survey students, departments and alumni annually to gather data on SJ practices and research across the community.

## **Vision - Campus Spirit**

The Brandeis community: undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, alumni, staff members, parents and friends, will own an expanded sense of campus spirit, and espouse a strong sense of pride in our connection to Brandeis. Brandeis will be known globally as an institution of unique pride and spirit, particularly regarding our academic excellence, and commitments to social justice, the arts, and cultural diversity, and as the place where, even in athletics, collegial support is the norm.

## **Recommendation**

Over the next five years, the university will actively seek opportunities to promote visibility of Brandeis; to highlight the success of our students, faculty, and alumni; and to build exhibition of campus spirit around our well-known strengths in arts and culture, in addition to efforts to build new support around athletics and other inter-mural competition. This charge should be assigned at the senior administrative level, to ensure that the items put forth here are implemented for the entire Brandeis community, including alumni, parents and friends; that the initiatives are maintained and assessed on an on-going basis; and that the efforts are integrated purposefully and thoughtfully with institutional communication planning.

## **Rationale/Background**

Major concerns raised in all phases of information gathering for the strategic planning process included the reputation of Brandeis, and a perception of low school spirit. This seems in stark contrast to the amazing passion and energy of our student life and academic accomplishments. It highlights a need to take a fresh approach to encouraging all members of our community to be ambassadors for our successes and distinctions, but also some weakness in building a strong sense of Brandeis community and pride.

The dynamic work of athletics and our nationally competitive student organizations, such as those in debate, slam poetry, and mock trial, can play an important role in uniting the campus. Attention to those portions of our community should complement our long tradition of support for arts and cultural campus life, serving as multi-faceted and integrated focal points for our establishing a greater sense that we are all part of a vital and important Brandeis community, as well as elevating our student experience and the Brandeis University campus to consistent and national prominence.

This proposal recognizes the tremendous distinction between the performing and visual arts, cultural diversity, and competitive programs. It in no way should be construed as designating athletics and competition as core Brandeisian values similar to the distinctive roles for the arts and diversity. These differing entities, however, all have the power to serve as convening forces of campus spirit, and greater interaction to insert our core values into athletics and competition would enhance that process.

## **Action Items**

Brandeis will launch an aggressive communications planning effort to communicate our distinctive qualities to our external and internal audiences.

Brandeis will make targeted investments in athletics and inter-mural student competition, such as debate, mock trial, ballroom dance, or other areas where Brandeis students, with reasonable support, have the potential to receive wider recognition for their talent and efforts.

- Enhance recruitment of outstanding students in the arts, athletics, and competitive fields such as debate and mock trial.

- Promote, externally and internally, accomplishments and events.
- Expand networking opportunities for alumni and friends with careers in, affinity for, and/or past participation in the arts, cultural activities, athletics, and other inter-mural competition.
- Plan for infrastructure needed to support these efforts, ranging from performance and studio space on campus to athletic and recreation facilities.

Explore opportunities for integration and mutual support in such diverse aspects of Brandeis as cultural organizations and events, arts, and athletics

- Develop (and in some cases enhance) distinctive events that help bring the various Brandeis constituencies together in ways that draw on our values as a liberal arts, research institution with a mission of social justice and acceptance:
  - A unique "midnight madness" event to kick off a Brandeis "season"
  - Performances of arts groups at athletic competitions
  - Art exhibits, concerts, theatrical productions, slam poetry and debate contests, and acapella events that embrace social justice
- Research on health and wellness issues presented along with recreation and athletic opportunities.
- Mini cultural and arts festivals built around athletic and club competition.
- Create efforts to connect key affinity groups with alumni and friends, especially in long-standing successful groups: acapella, dance, debate, for instance, to mirror athletics affinity groups.

Celebrating our Jewish heritage while honoring our multi-cultural and multi-faith community

- Recognize openly and proudly that Brandeis has the largest percentage of Jewish students, and perhaps the most diverse Jewish community, of any research university or liberal arts college, as well as the largest and oldest Near Eastern and Judaic Studies program in the U.S., and possibly the world (outside of Israel).
- Expand our commitment to our Jewish community, moving to a full-time Rabbi as part of our campus chaplaincy, and establishing appropriate funds and structures to support Jewish life on campus to be consistent with welcoming the entire community to understand the values, strengths, and challenges that stem from our unique legacy, and bringing the diverse streams of Jewish students into improved understanding and connections.
- Brandeis will also raise support for and visibility of the Intercultural Center and Inter-faith Chaplaincy. Careful attention will be given to honoring the traditions and faiths of our diverse community, starting with the establishment of a Hindu priest as an addition to the Chaplaincy.
- Information about the university, including websites, recruitment publications, and events at orientation, will provide education and information about the Jewish roots of Brandeis and the importance of valuing our pluralistic, multi-faith community.

Expand support for graduate students, recognizing them overtly as critical participants in campus spirit

- Enhancement of formally planned social activities for graduate students.
- Better acknowledgement and communication of the various graduate student organizations that already exist on campus (such as the Graduate Doers Club), as well as the creation of new graduate student networks for social interaction.
- Inclusion of graduate students in the campus-wide spirit efforts and events.
- Possible graduate-undergraduate mentorship opportunities for undergraduate student activities/organizations, utilizing strengths of graduate student experiences outside the classroom.

## **Vision - Student recruitment, selectivity, enrollment, and capacity**

Brandeis university will be THE premiere destination for an increasingly diverse group of students who demonstrate/express a commitment to our core values of social justice and repairing the world, and who are of the highest caliber. To do so, Brandeis will maintain our commitment to removing cost as a barrier to access.

## **Recommendation**

Throughout our recruitment efforts, Brandeis will celebrate our unique Jewish heritage as a framework for explaining our distinction as a liberal arts research university committed to social justice and acceptance in a multi-cultural, multi-faith environment. Brandeis will seek to diversify our enrollment, particularly geographically, but also ethnically and socioeconomically, without in any way diminishing our pride in that Jewish heritage nor in any way seeking to lower Jewish student enrollment. Brandeis will raise the academic profile of incoming students at all levels while also increasing the number of students identifying Brandeis as their top choice. Brandeis will, then, align the services of the campus to successfully accommodate, at a high level of quality, this number of incoming students.

## **Rationale**

- In addition to seeking committed, high profile students, Brandeis should seek to become the first-choice for such students from across the country and around the world. This will greatly enhance our sense of community and institutional pride by creating a common recognition of our shared social justice values and distinction of being part of the Brandeis family.
- Brandeis will not seek to lower the number of enrolled Jewish students, but rather to embrace Brandeis' identity as a multi-cultural, multi-faith institution and reflect that in our undergraduate student body through efforts consistent with our values.
- Brandeis will work across our community, led by centrally coordinated communication planning, to find consistent and marketable ways to describe our unique nature as a non-sectarian liberal arts research university founded by the Jewish community to pursue social justice values.

## **Action items**

- Establish a campus effort, coordinated centrally but with input from throughout the Brandeis community, to establish language and messaging that best represents the institution.
- Launch an aggressive Brandeis awareness campaign, particularly targeting high schools, high school age students, and their parents.
- Articulate the unique excitement and opportunity surrounding mid-year admission to Brandeis.
- Expand geographic recruitment domestically and internationally.
- Expand existing and establish new outstanding precollege programs and cohort programs that enhance institutional reputation and support recruiting the best and brightest students from diverse backgrounds.
- Explore potential new markets in transfer students, veterans, senior citizens, and online programs/coursework, and develop policies and practices to support markets that support Brandeis' mission, values, and goals.
- Explore score optional undergraduate admission.

Begin the process of moving to be a "low to no debt" institution.

- Maintain financial aid levels sufficient to support students from diverse backgrounds, with a new and focused emphasis on managing student debt loads to move them lower, within institutional fiscal responsibility.
- Explore establishing loan forgiveness/deferment programs for low to moderate income graduates that go into social justice jobs/careers and other high value/low salary fields, and with a immediate focus on options for Brandeis students with the highest debt loads.
- Expand financial literacy training and efforts for students.

Establish and then widely publicize a new and nationally leading edge team-based student service model.

- Begin to break down traditional service "silos" across recruitment, admissions, orientation, advising and career services (just to name a few) to offer students a comprehensive team service approach
- Continue to establish and enhance services unique to the needs of graduate students around presentations, dissertation-writing, careers, and interviewing.

Scale enrollment to capacity, and capacity to student enrollment in facilities and campus services, establishing facilities and services that can support recruitment efforts, but at least that present no barriers to recruitment.

- Lower size of traditional on-campus student population at reasonable rates to ease stress on campus facilities, services, and systems.
- Eliminate use of substandard housing and planned housing overloads.
- Bring all housing up to institutional standards.
- Expand parking and transportation services to support enrollment, access, and campus life.
- Launch a transportation master planning process in conjunction with facilities' master planning efforts.
- Raise dining quality and options across campus to levels consistent with the best of our peer institutions.

## **Vision – Healthy Community**

Brandeis will model best practices in supporting the physical and emotional health of our students, faculty, and staff members and become known for this, increasing Brandeis' listing as a top employer/place to live and to enroll.

## **Recommendation**

Brandeis will enhance and expand its health and wellness spaces and services on campus, aligning each with the right service model to allow for proper visibility as well as discrete access points where appropriate, such as in the case of mental health and sexual assault support services. Enhancements will center around an increased focus and commitment to the encouragement of healthy living and healthy working on our campus.

## **Rationale**

The World Health Organization defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Brandeis University seeks to expand this ideology by advocating health as a lifestyle, not merely a condition. It posits that all members of its community should have the right to ample resources adequate of upholding the healthiest standard of living possible. The objective of this strategic plan is to suggest methods of establishing a campus environment that is proactive in maintaining the health and wellness of Brandeis University and its surrounding community in future years. Centralizing campus health under a single Health and Wellness organizing structure could serve as a better tool with the following benefits:

- Financial discounts when negotiating health premiums (improves health insurance)
- Staff and Faculty view it as a valuable resource that makes Brandeis an even better employer
- Marketability to prospective students, faculty, and staff
- Retention rates of current students and employees

Brandeis University's central philosophy aims to cultivate the growth, development and prosperity of the whole person (intellectual, emotional, spiritual, social, and physical). Towards this end, health and wellness resources should be well-coordinated, visible, and easily accessible to members of the Brandeis community.

## **Action Items**

- Provide adequate, visible and accessible co-located space for the Psychological Counseling Center, nutritionist, Health Center, Disability Services, and aligned future units such as sexual assault services (to include consideration of needs for discrete access)
- Establish satellite wellness centers with appropriate, current, and well-maintained cardio-vascular exercise equipment, as well as spaces for group exercise such as aerobics, yoga or pilates
  - Exercise space in Gosman should be updated and expanded, and facilities must be added in the upper campus area. The task force recommends facilities in the area of East and North quads, and another with a particular focus on graduate students and faculty in the Mandel quad.
- Improve dining selections to better reflect our commitment to physical health, as well as to the variety of dietary restrictions on our campus (i.e., religious and health-related options, such as gluten-free, vegetarian/vegan options, and organic).

## Improve education, outreach, engagement and health resources

- New Health and Wellness Website: Brandeis should redesign its health services website to centralize both themes in an informative and accessible manner to students, faculty, staff, and visitors. This would provide a summary of health services available at Brandeis and in the surrounding community, as well as inform people of various support groups on campus that are actively involved in promoting healthy practices (i.e., nutritionist, personal trainers, PERC etc.). The website would also contain links to relevant online journals about health, such as *Student Health 101* or *The Journal of American College Health*, and a calendar of on-campus and off-campus events specifically aimed at addressing various health topics.
- Special Events: Education of Brandeis University about trending health issues (such as mental health) could be achieved through workshops, student-led peer groups, mini-courses, and specially planned "health" events to welcome diverse approaches and stimulate an engaged and informed campus atmosphere. This has already been demonstrated through groups like PERC, and events like the "Disrupting the Script" conference. Events such as these may break down the barriers between staff, faculty, graduate student, and undergraduate student populations. Events like these can also highlight the work being done academically with our students, faculty, and staff in areas surrounding health.
- Peer Education/Peer Mentoring: Brandeis should continue to encourage the development of peer mentoring/education groups that promote student involvement in maintaining health on campus (BEMCO, PERC, SSIS, etc.).

## **VISION – Campus Engagement**

Brandeis will be widely recognized as THE liberal arts, research university for life-changing, positive, transformative faculty/student interactive experiences, and every Brandeis student will routinely have access to these opportunities. In addition, Brandeis will have an enhanced sense of community between all constituencies, setting as the norm ongoing connection between and among faculty, staff, undergraduate and graduate students, alumni, and friends of the university.

### **Recommendation**

The Brandeis community will foster and expand structured opportunities for productive, mutually beneficial engagement between undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends, focusing on opportunities that highlight Brandeisian values.

### **Rationale**

Our special campus community is made up of amazing people who are Brandeis; bringing the interaction of those people in formal and informal learning experiences is a crucial part of what makes Brandeis special. Students consistently work alongside faculty and staff in both formal and informal capacities on a day-to-day basis. Brandeis should formalize and capitalize on this special aspect of our community by highlighting, enhancing, and expanding such life-changing opportunities, particularly between faculty and students, but also reaching across to staff, graduate and undergraduate interactions, and connections with alumni. Bringing people together in this way will increase communication regarding Brandeis strengths and achievements, and foster deeper and broader collaboration across constituencies.

### **Action Items**

Support for continuing and expanding existing programs (see appendix for details):

- Justice Brandeis Semester
- World of Work scholarships for social justice internships
- Undergraduate research initiatives
- Alumni career network (*note – check with Hiatt on name*)
- Alumni/Friends career panels
- Fellowships (Sorenson for example)
- Study abroad/elsewhere led by Brandeis faculty/alumni/graduate students

Establishing new formal programs to support interaction

- Graduate to undergraduate mentorship programs
- Alumni/Faculty Affinity network: starting with Social Justice Network, but including arts, diversity, etc.

Updated and enhanced technology to promote online campus engagement, to reflect our recent trends in communications, such as increased use of social media to enhance interactions. Campus websites must be updated, interactive, and helpful, and should be integrated with social media strategy.

Brandeis will foster and expand interaction among students, faculty, staff and alumni with a particular focus on expansion of interactions in residence halls and dining

Grow Living/Learning Communities

- Continue to create models that allow a wide variety of faculty to be engaged (within very reasonable time commitments) while enhancing connections and sense of community among students, both graduate and undergraduate, with faculty members having scholarship in areas of common interest. Include researchers, alumni, and friends as resources for these communities.
- Expand community dinners – building on the long tradition of Shabbat dinners and the newer addition of the community Yom Kippur Break the Fast, create a series of regular opportunities for the Brandeis community to gather, formally and informally, around meals that explore our Jewish heritage as well as our multi-cultural and interfaith community.
- In-Residence presentations and classes – make best use of presentation space within residence spaces to encourage faculty to teach structured classes along with ad hoc teach-ins, seminars, panels, and discussions, with student living space.
- Faculty/Student dining opportunities - expand successful faculty lunch program and add smaller opportunities, such as library coffee café discounts for students hosting faculty members using their meal plan points (potentially a benefit for meal plan membership) – establish permanent discounts and plans to support faculty/student/staff/alumni meals.
- Establish community-wide service days, engaging students along with faculty, staff, alumni and friends in service to the Waltham community.

Encourage graduate students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends to live proximal to campus

- Financing – create fiscal structures to support Brandeis community members purchasing property proximal to campus.
- Establish off-campus/university supported housing in surrounding area or (potentially through partnerships) build new structures on campus, particularly geared to graduate students.
- Explore options for housing faculty and staff on campus, within student residence halls and/or in new structures established (potentially through partnerships) for this purpose.

Brandeis should be (and be known as) a global leader in support for, service to, and interaction with international students.

- Expand international student services to lead the U.S. in service and support models.
- Enhance opportunities for interaction, building on the dynamic cultural exploration activities and events throughout campus (i.e. – MELA - see appendix).
- Diversify international enrollment through aggressive global recruitment.

## APPENDIX

### Social Justice

Deis Impact

Undergraduate proposal for a center

### Campus Spirit

Slam Poetry Team placed 9<sup>th</sup> Nationally 2 years ago.

The Brandeis debate team, B.A.D.A.S.S., is currently ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> in the nation

Tennis All-American

Soccer regional achievement

Brandeis Dance Collective, which brings current students and alumni together annually to create a dance production. Things are being done but others may not know they are happening.

Measuring campus spirit through student satisfaction and alumni participation – qualitative assessment rather than measurement. Can be provided in an appendix.

Graduate Doers Club

### Enrollment

Supporting Information

Housing Capacity

- Add 150 new on campus rooms within the next five years (approximately 75 to replace overloads and substandard housing)
- Specific square foot per student minimum
- Specific bathroom facility per student minimum
- Specific common space per student minimum

Proposal for first year class size moderation (projections to develop in conjunction with facilities with intention of being able to house 90% of undergraduates and a reasonable number of graduates in university housing by 2016)

Fall 2012 - projected 820-830

Fall 2013 -

Fall 2014 -

Fall 2015 -

Fall 2016 -

Expand local transfer population (projections to develop in conjunction with facilities task force with intention of growing local transfer students as parking availability is matched to growth)

Fall 2012 - projected 65

Fall 2013 -

Fall 2014 -

Fall 2015 -

Fall 2016 -

### Campus Engagement

Justice Brandeis Semester: This is a program to expand and grow and can become a hallmark of the Brandeis experience, for students to not only become closely engaged with an academic endeavor, but to connect deeply with faculty, classmates, and potentially Waltham community partners. (From website: A Justice Brandeis Semester (JBS) is an engaging, immersive academic

program in which small groups of students explore a thematic topic through inquiry-based courses linked to real-world experiential opportunities.

JBS internships, field-based research, creative work or community-engaged learning allow students to:

- gain real-world experience through experiential learning.
- build close relationships with professors and small groups of students.
- acquire skills that will make them stand apart from their peers after Brandeis.

The distinctive elements of a Brandeis education include the intense intellectual engagement students share with our cutting-edge faculty; the rich experiential learning opportunities students encounter in studios, archives, research labs, work settings and the community; and the university's longstanding commitment to global engagement and social justice. All of these elements are embodied in the new Justice Brandeis Semester.)

WOW Scholarships: This program continues to enable our students to intern anywhere in the world, but giving an incentive to students who want to focus in the Waltham Community can encourage community engagement. In addition, the program should expand and grow. As we know, many students cannot do internships without these scholarships. What other scholarships to support student engagement should be created?

Undergraduate Research: Being a liberal arts institution as well as a research university gives us a unique brand and edge, and our undergraduates should continue to benefit from this unique pairing of academic endeavors. These opportunities should expand and grow, for students to not only connect on a deep level with faculty engaged in research, but to also connect our undergraduate and graduate populations together, which is a gap that we MUST close.

Formal Graduate-undergraduate experiences: These two communities of students have so much to offer each other but still very much co-exist without nearly as much interaction as should be taking place on our campus, in both the academic and student life spheres.

Fellowships: Our fellowships provide students with the chance to not only engage with the world at large, but they bring back their experiences to our campus and these experiences can be used as a catalyst for formal engagement on our campus. For example, the annual Ethics Center Sorensen Fellowship Presentation is an amazing tribute to the students' work, but why are we not putting this on a larger stage? More people should be hearing this and more people should be participating. Why aren't we having a fellowship presentation where students from all over campus and in every discipline can come and present their work? This great work is already happening, it just needs to be expanded and coordinated in a way that brings it to a greater stature on the campus.

MELA: means "Fair" in Hindi. *Mela* is a Sanskrit word meaning 'gathering' or 'to meet' or a fair. At Brandeis, MELA is the South Asian Students Association's annual production. The event features cultural performances from countries that are part of South Asia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The show includes dance, music, spoken word and other performances.